

The Native American
Women's Health Education
Resource Center

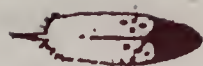


Protect yourself and
the ones you love:

Know the Facts
About HPV and
Genital Warts



They're more common than
you might think.



WHAT IS HPV?

HPV, or human papillomavirus, is the name of a group of viruses that consist of more than 70 different types. Particular kinds of HPV can cause visible genital warts, medically known as *condylomata accuminata*. HPV may now be one of the most common sexually transmitted infections in the U.S.

WHAT GENITAL WARTS LOOK LIKE

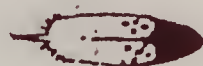
Genital warts are usually painless growths or bumps that appear on the vulva, labia, in or around the vagina or anus, on the cervix, and on the penis, scrotum or groin. They can be raised or flat in texture, and small or large in size. Although genital warts cluster together to form a cauliflower-like shape.

SOMETIMES HPV DOES NOT CAUSE VISIBLE WARTS

While HPV can sometimes cause an outbreak of genital warts, it may also cause small changes on the skin that cannot be easily seen. In addition, sometimes HPV can live on the skin without causing any warts at all. This is termed "subclinical" HPV.

WHO IS AFFECTED BY HPV OR GENITAL WARTS

HPV infection, including genital warts, occurs in sexually active men and wom-





en of all races, ages, social classes, and sexual orientation. On rare occasions, infants can be infected by their HPV-infected mothers during birth.

HOW HPV AND GENITAL WARTS ARE TRANSMITTED

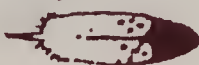
HPV and genital warts are most often transmitted by direct, skin-to-skin contact during vaginal, anal, or oral sex with someone infected with HPV. The HPV infection can also be spread in this way when warts are not present.

Warmth and moisture encourage the growth of warts. Warts usually appear from 3 weeks to 8 months after exposure, or they may never appear at all. This may make it difficult for you to determine when or from whom you got the virus.

Warts on other parts of the body (e.g. hands) are caused by different types of HPV. Direct contact with these kinds of warts do not seem to cause genital warts.

HOW YOU KNOW YOU HAVE HPV OR GENITAL WARTS

Sometimes genital warts are hard to detect because they are inside the vagina, on the cervix, or in the anus. Genital warts are also often flesh-colored and painless. Occasionally they cause pain, itching or bleeding. Although an abnormal Pap smear in women may indicate that HPV is present, an abnormal Pap smear alone is not conclusive evidence of HPV infection.





YOU SHOULD GO TO A DOCTOR OR CLINIC IF:

- you experience unusual itching, pain, or bleeding.

or

- you notice unusual growths, bumps, or abnormalities in the skin on or near your penis, vagina, vulva or anus.

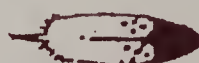
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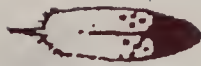
- your sex partner tells you that he/she has HPV or genital warts.

If you believe you have genital warts or have been exposed to HPV, ask your health care providers to check the potentially exposed area more closely. They may use a magnifying lens to see small warts or they may use a solution of acetic acid (like vinegar) on the genitals. Use of acetic acid causes abnormal tissue to turn white. This makes warts easier to see, especially if they are viewed through a magnifying lens such as a colposcope.

HOW SUBCLINICAL HPV INFECTION IS DETECTED

Although a Pap smear was designed primarily to test for precancerous cervical changes, an abnormal Pap smear often shows changes that can be caused by HPV infection. If you have an abnormal Pap smear, have your health care provider examine you further for cervical problems and evidence of HPV.

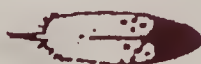




TREATMENT OF GENITAL WARTS

The goal of treatment of genital warts should be to remove visible warts and get rid of annoying symptoms, thereby reducing the chance that warts will spread to other individuals. All treatments may cause damage to surrounding tissue. Several methods of treatment for genital warts exist:

- **Cryotherapy** freezing off the wart with liquid nitrogen. Effective and relatively inexpensive, although it hurts briefly and may cause scarring.
- **Podofilox** and **podophyllin**: most often used chemical compounds that may be applied directly to the surface of the wart. Both chemical treatments are relatively inexpensive and effective. However, while podofilox can be applied by the patient, podophyllin is a more dangerous chemical and must be applied by your health care provider.
- **Trichloroacetic acid (TCA)**: chemical applied to the surface of the wart by a health care provider.
- **Electrocautery**: destroying the affected tissue with electric current. Only utilized by some physicians.
- **Laser therapy**: using an intense light to destroy the warts. Expensive method used by doctors only in serious cases.
- **Surgery**: cutting off the warts. Expensive method of treatment used only by physicians in complicated cases. This procedure requires an anesthetic.
- **Interferon**: antiviral drug occasionally used by doctors. Causes some discomfort.





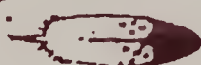
THINGS TO REMEMBER WHEN GETTING TREATMENT

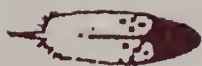
- Ask your doctor for an explanation of the treatment including potential costs, risks and benefits.
- Be sure to understand the follow-up instructions.
- Be patient. Various methods of treatment and several visits may be necessary. Since viruses live inside skin cells, recurrences of HPV may occasionally develop. Treatment, however, is often very successful.
- Do not use drugstore treatments on genital warts. These treatments are meant for warts occurring on less sensitive areas of the body.
- Avoid sexual contact during treatment since it may disrupt therapy.

HPV, GENITAL WARTS AND CANCER

The types of HPV associated with cervical cancer are usually not the kinds that cause genital warts. However, a woman with genital warts should get a Pap smear done every year.

Certain types of HPV that cause subclinical infection are being studied as factors that may cause a woman to be more likely to develop cervical cancer. Other "risk factors" for cervical cancer may include first intercourse at an early age, smoking, and the presence of other STDs: Having yearly Pap smears, which detect abnormal cells present on the surface of the cervix, are the best protection against cervical cancer.





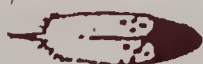
HPV, GENITAL WARTS AND PREGNANCY

Because of the hormonal changes involved, pregnancy can cause a change in the size and number of genital warts. A decrease in the elasticity of the vaginal wall may result, making vaginal delivery risky. On rare occasions, babies exposed to HPV may develop warts on the throat. While there is this added risk, a pregnant woman does not necessarily have to have a Caesarian-section delivery unless warts are obstructing the birth canal. Nevertheless, a pregnant woman must always inform her health care provider if she or her partner has had HPV or genital warts.

HOW TO PROTECT YOURSELF FROM HPV OR GENITAL WARTS

To reduce the risk of getting any sexually transmitted disease (including HPV or genital warts):

- Practice abstinence or be involved in a mutually monogamous relationship. Having more than one sexual partner puts you at higher risk of contracting sexually transmitted infections.
- Use a latex condom. Condoms provide some protection against sexually transmitted infections if they cover the area infected with HPV.
- Spermicidal foams, creams and jellies are not proven to act against HPV and genital warts but they are effective against some other sexually transmitted infections. They are most effective if used along with condoms rather than in place of condoms.



**For more information,
please contact:**

- the Sexually Transmitted Diseases/ Infections clinic in your local health department
- your own health care provider
- the *National Sexually Transmitted Disease Hotline* at (800) 227-8922
- the *American Social Health Association*, Resource Center, Dept. C, P.O. Box 13827, Research Triangle Park, NC 27709, (919) 361-8400
- HPV support groups in AZ, FL, NE, NY, OK, SC, TX, VA, WV, and WA. Call the American Social Health Association at (919) 361-8400 for locations and phone numbers.
- the *National Women's Health Network* at (202) 347-1140

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